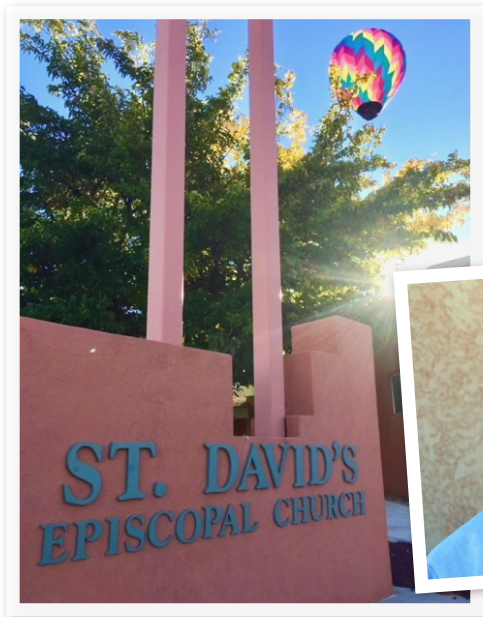


# A Message from the Priest ~ July 2, 2023



MATTHEW 10:40-42

PROPER 8

7-2-23

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight,  
O God, our strength, and our salvation.*

First of all, let me wish you a happy and safe Independence Day! While I tend to think that national holidays don't really have a primary place in the life of the church in this country, there are many events in the life of this country that lend themselves to this short gospel reading.

Jesus says to his disciples, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." This is obviously an important message; it shows up in some variation in all of the gospels, often more than once. Later in Matthew 18 we will hear, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me . . ." and again in chapter 25, ". . . just as you did it to one of the least of these, . . . you did it to me." Mark and Luke include similar verses, and in John 13 we read, ". . . whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me." As I used to tell people as I was orienting them to probation, "you can figure out how important something is by the number of times it is repeated."

In the first century Middle East, and for thousands of years before that, hospitality was seen as an obligation. It was a matter of individual survival, as well as community health. This became a major piece of the religious understanding of what God wants of us and for us. Where and how do we experience such welcome today? How much of the hospitality that is offered is merely an exchange for hospitality we have received, or anticipate receiving from others? This transactional hospitality is not the welcoming Jesus teaches.

It has been said that one way to judge the health of a country is by how the widows and children are treated, by how strangers are treated. When we look at how immigrants and refugees are treated here, when we look at how the poor and marginalized are treated, overall, in this country there isn't much evidence of a healthy Christ-based society.

Instead of welcoming we hear words of separation, words which break relationships, words of opposition and denunciation. We know how much ugliness has played out across this country and around the world in recent years. Welcoming has turned to self-defensive isolation. Compassion seems to be a word that has been banished from our lexicon.

Yet compassion is exactly what we are hearing about in these three short verses from Matthew this morning. Jesus teaches that true spirituality is in embracing a child, in caring for the weak and outcast; it is about feeding the hungry person, visiting the sick or the imprisoned. True spirituality is about being willing to give someone a cup of cold water on a hot day. All of these actions come out of simple compassion for the plight of another creature. As often as we say, “God is love,” we can also say “God is compassion.”

“But,” you might be thinking, “those actions are so small, so insignificant, in the face of the huge problems we have in the world. What difference does it make?” Listen again to the end of this reading: “whoever gives *even* a cup of cold water to one of these . . . none of these will lose their reward.” Yes, even a cup of water can make a huge difference to the recipient. We know how true that is, living here in the desert. The climate and environment here are not very different from that of the Middle East. We can easily see what happens when a person travelling through our area is without water, or shelter, or food — if we take a moment to see what is around us.

I know that I’m preaching to the choir a little bit here. Giving of yourselves to others is a common practice here. Individually giving to others, whether water or a smile, isn’t the only compassion that you provide. You continue to financially support kindergarten teachers in Africa, providing support for education that can be life changing. You help support the hungry in this area through the Circle of Page, with the food bank and the soup kitchen; you help fill other needs of the poor through the Circle of Page emergency fund and the work of the Salvation Army. Thank you, thank you thank you. You also help support hungry children during the school year through the backpack program run by the school district, again thank you.

All of this grassroots discipleship is important, not just for the support it provides to the neediest, but also for the vehicle it provides for us who are learning how to be disciples. These programs allow us to express the love and compassion we find in Christ.

At the end of the day, isn’t life about having a heart that is living what our new banner says: Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God? It is then that we share with others the same grace, mercy, and unconditional love that we have received.

Amen.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathalin" followed by a small cross symbol.

The Rev. Kathalin Walker